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Contra aid opponents renew fight in Congress

By Christopher Simpson
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Congressional opponents of President Reagan's \$100 million aid package for the Nicaraguan resistance yesterday renewed efforts to derail the measure but admitted it probably will be signed into law soon.

At a morning news conference, four veterans of the military now fasting on the steps of the Capitol were accompanied by more than a dozen liberal lawmakers who pledged to continue their efforts to reverse the president's Central American policy.

"We can't afford, as a nation, to repeat the mistakes of a Vietnam," said Sen. John Kerry, Massachusetts Democrat. "We can't be satisfied to wage a surrogate war. A 53-47 vote in the U.S. Senate is not a moral basis for laying down the olive branch of peace."

Congressional opponents of the aid package yesterday circulated a letter on the floor of the House and the Senate seeking support for the fasters and against the aid. Mr. Kerry said new questions over aid have been raised since a transport plane with four Americans was reported to have been shot down Sunday in Nicaragua.

"This is still in the allegation stage, but it raises very serious questions," Mr. Kerry said of the downed plane, which the Marxist Sandinista government of Nicaragua said was on a CIA mission. Three Americans were said to have been killed and one taken prisoner.

Mr. Kerry, who conceded that there is little chance of defeating the \$100 million package that won narrow approval in the House and Senate, said opponents will renew their efforts to scuttle the policy when the 100th Congress opens in January.

But Charlie Liteky, a former Catholic priest in Vietnam and winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, said changing the administration's policy next year may be too late for the four veterans in the midst of a prolonged fast to publicize their opposition to the aid package.

"Yes, we are willing to die for the truth rather than live in the darkness of lies," Mr. Liteky, who renounced his medal of honor in July, said. "We see a repetition of the sins of our past, and we say not again."

Mr. Liteky and George Mizo, a purple heart recipient in the Vietnam War, have not eaten since their vigil began Sept. 1. Brian Wilson, a Vietnam veteran, and Duncan Murphy, who served in World War II, joined the fast on the Capitol steps Sept. 15.

"There is time to stop the carnage," Mr. Murphy told reporters. "We're putting our lives on the line. Stop the killing, stop the passage of this \$100 million bill now."

The anti-Sandinista package, which passed the House in June and has been approved twice this year in the Senate, is Mr. Reagan's top foreign policy initiative of his second term. The measure — attached to the military construction bill — includes \$70 million in military funds and \$30 million in non-lethal aid to the resistance forces through next September.

The military spending bill is included in the continuing resolution, a massive year-ending spending measure which includes funds for all 13 major appropriations bills which have not cleared Congress and been sent to the White House.

Because the House and Senate versions of the \$100 million rebel aid packages are identical, they cannot be changed during the meetings now under way by congressional leaders aiming to reach a compromise on the overall spending bill, said Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard Lugar, Republican of Indiana.

A congressional compromise on the spending bill is expected to be completed late this week and sent to the White House. Mr. Reagan has threatened to veto the package because of widespread administration objections about some of the bill's measures that are unrelated to the Nicaraguan resistance aid.

But lawmakers said there appears little, if any, chance the anti-Sandinista proposals will not soon become law.

"Part of the problem is that it is in both the continuing resolutions now," said Rep. Norman Mineta, California Democrat. "We may be boxed out."